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Christ and the Resurrection.



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CHRIST AND THE RESURRECTION.

A SERMON IN SONG,

—BY—

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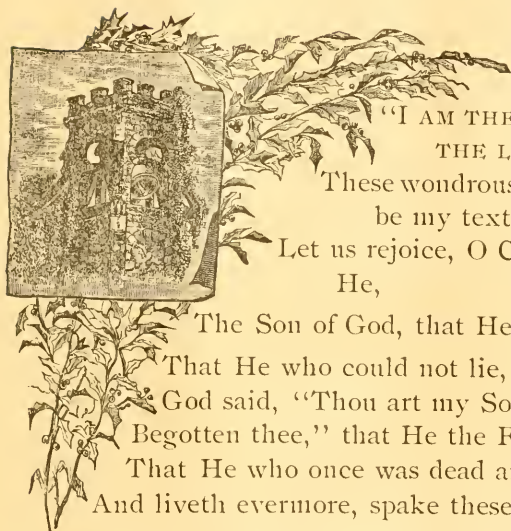
Behold, the angel of the resurrection stand
Beside the tomb with Easter lilies in her hand,
And gazing on the weeping one with longing eyes
She points to heaven and says, "Thy loved one lives, arise!"



G. W. Crofts.

CHRIST AND THE RESURRECTION.

Text, John xi, 25: *I am the resurrection and the life.*



"I AM THE RESURRECTION AND
THE LIFE."

These wondrous words of Christ shall
be my text.

Let us rejoice, O Christian friends, that
He,

The Son of God, that He who was the Truth,
That He who could not lie, that He to whom
God said, "Thou art my Son, this day have I
Begotten thee," that He the First and Last,
That He who once was dead and is alive,
And liveth evermore, spake these sweet words.

Let us rejoice, O, Christian friends, for now
We surely know that these sweet words are true.
For had these words been but the words of man,
One like unto ourselves of erring mind,
One like unto ourselves of sinful heart,
To heed them then, O friends, we would not dare;
But like a song that sweetly dies away,
Or like a flower that withers 'neath the sun,
Or like the drap'ry of the morn that fades
Before the rising day, these words would die,
And in their death our hope would be no more.

To God then let us sing,
With happy hearts and free,
For death has lost its sting,
The grave, its victory.

No more we dread the tomb,
Since Christ within it lay;
He robbed it of its gloom,
And made it fair as day.

'Tis now a place most dear,
Of calm and blest repose,
We joy to see it near
Because the Savior rose.

O, Thou, who from above
Didst send so great a gift,
With gratitude and love,
Our songs to Thee we lift.

Thus having made our faith and hope secure
On words of truth more lasting than the sun,—
For said He not, “The heavens shall pass away,
But these my words shall never pass away?”
And having sung a hymn to God, to whom
All praise of right belongs, for all His love
Expressed to us in ways outnumbering
The sands upon the ocean’s shore, but more
Especially in that great Gift of His
Unspeakable, His only Son, our Lord,
In whom if we believe, we ne’er shall die;
Who died and yet who rose from out the tomb,—
Let us withdraw the curtain that obscures
This wondrous Being from our view, and catch
Brief glimpses of His life and character.

In Bethlehem, a babe, we Him behold
Within a manger lying. Humble place

For one of royal birth, and yet no throne
Of temporal power, not that of Israel,
Nor that of Rome that held a world in chains,
Was good enough for Him. The heir of Heaven,
To found a kingdom vast, embracing all
Mankind, had little need of earthly pomp and show.
The angel choir announced His birth as ne'er
Before a being's birth was heralded.

The humble shepherds heard the song and came
And gazed on Him with joy. The wise men saw
The star and followed where it led, and found
The Babe and worshiped Him, and gave Him gifts
Of gold and fragrant frankincense and myrrh.
Around that little Babe of Bethlehem
Began then to revolve events supreme ;
The Past, with silvery locks, did point to Him,
The Present stood and said, " Behold the Light !"
The Future yet unborn was made to thrill
With glorious hope. He to the world was sun
New-born, the center of a system pure
And bright ; yea, brighter than the Pleiades,
Or than Orion, because of truth divine.

Then down to Egypt trace Him in His flight
From cruel Herod's bloody sword, that once
Again God's word might be fulfilled that said,
" From out of Egypt have I called my Son."
And then, when Herod had to judgment gone,
Mark His return to flowery Nazareth,
That mountain village, where, a loving child,
He grew in favor sweet with God and man,
Just like a flower on which the sun doth shine,
On which the rain doth fall, unhurt by worm,
Unsmitten by the frost or torn with wind,
So fair, so beautiful and good that one
Might dream of troops of angels coming down
From Heaven's gate to fondly gaze on Him.

There see Him stand a lad of twelve among
The doctors of the law, and questions deep
Propound, and answers to deep questions give,
Until a stillness settles o'er them all
And they are made to feel that God once more
To Israel hath sent a prophet wise.

Then let imagination picture Him
Advance in stature and in mind, advance
In loveliness of character, advance
In human majesty, a majesty
Through which the Spirit shone like light within
A ruby crystal, calm and marvellous.

O who can picture Him,
The Man of Nazareth?
Art's colors are too dim,
They are but dust and death.

No mind can Him conceive,
No soul can Him embrace,
No poet's fancy weave
The beauty of His face.

Throw pen and pencil by
Forever to repose,
A star take from the sky,
And from the earth a rose.

Let these in loveliness
Sweet symbols of Him be,
And silently express
His loveliness to thee.

And now the time has come, the hour is ripe
For His great mission to begin. Go, stand
By Jordan's ford, Bethabara. There see
A mighty multitude around a man
Austere. Give ear unto his cry, "Repent!

Repent! Behold Heaven's kingdom is at hand!
Behold! the King of Heaven draweth nigh!"
And as he speaks behold this Personage
Of whom we've had a meager glimpse appear.
Behold the Lamb of God that taketh hence
The sins of all the world. And then behold
Him going down with John into the stream,
Receiving at his hand the holy rite
Of baptism, honoring thus the law of God.
And then behold him from the stream come up
And stand upon the shore! And then behold
A scene such as this world ne'er saw before;
The heavens from whence He came their portals ope
And like a dove of silver plumage bright
The Spirit on Him falls, while from the heavens
A voice is heard, the trumpet voice of God,
The voice that spake creation into birth,
The voice that said, "Let there be light!" and light
In whiteness flooded all the world, that said,
"This is my Son beloved, in whom I am
Well pleased!" 'Twas here the King was crowned, enthroned.
Now from this scene of glory follow Him,
If thou hast power, into the wilderness,
And there behold Him as He wrestles long,
For forty days and nights, with man's great foe.
Oh, if t'were said of one, "There goes the man
Who once in hell sojourned!" what shall we say
Of Him who met its hosts and conquered them!
And then when human strength is gone, behold
The angel bands, who from their citadels
Beheld the awful contest, flocking down
And ministering unto Him. Sublime the scene.

O tempted ones draw nigh
The man of Galilee,
He hears thy every sigh
And He will succor thee.

He conquered in His might
The tempter of our race,
And in the dreadful fight
He helps us by His grace.

And as He conquered, we
Shall also victory gain,
And at the last shall see
The hosts of evil slain.

And as the angels came
When human strength was spent,
So, to us in His name
The angels shall be sent.

He now goes forth a conqueror—no more
Does Satan dare confront the Son of God,
But in His holy presence meekly begs.
A conqueror ! and yet how oft 'twill seem
To mortal eyes that He is overcome.
And yet we know full well that His defeats
Were only stepping stones to victory.
A conqueror invincible, and yet
Not panoplied as warriors are was He ;
A leader and commander He, and yet
No mighty host at His command appears,
But just a little band of modest men
He calls to follow Him. 'Tis thus He starts
Upon His wondrous work ; most wondrous work
E'er viewed by man, or by the angel host.

We have not time to trace Him everywhere,
Nor all His deeds record. First view Him then
In Nazareth, His own dear childhood's home.
'Tis on the Sabbath, in the synagogue,
And, as His custom was in former days,
He rises in His place to read. The book
Esaias is handed Him and thus He reads :

“The Spirit of the Lord upon me is
Because to preach the gospel to the poor
Anointed I have been ; and God hath sent
Me out to heal the broken-hearted ones,
And to the captives give deliverance,
And sight give to the blind and liberty
Unto the bruised ; to preach the year of God
Acceptable.” And then the ancient book
He closed, and sitting down He said to all,
“This day is this most blessed word fulfilled.”
And then from out His heart like some great fount
He poured the living truth,—but not with love
Was it received, though given in love. In wrath
With one accord, they rose to thrust Him out,
And swept Him on in wrath unto the brow
Of that high hill on which the town was built
That they might cast Him o’er to dreadful death,
But He with power they knew not of, escaped.

Oh, blind and cruel men, to turn away
The light, the truth, that heaven had sent to them.
He leaves them and their synagogue for aye.
Then see Him on the mount as there He sits
That He may teach the living multitude.
Oh, listen to those words that fall like pearls
So white, the glorious beatitudes !
Oh, favored ears that heard those blessed words !
Oh, favored souls that caught those wondrous truths
That then and there were put in form of words
That they might gather them as Israel
In days of old the manna gathered up,
And though like manna sweet and nourishing,
Yet how unlike, for manna passed away,
While this remained, and still remains as then,
Philosophy divine, the truth of God,
Revealed then through Him, the Son of God,

Who came to show us God, to make us heirs
Of God by making us His children dear.
And we His children by the truth are made
And by the spirit of that truth that makes
Us like to Him, all kind and merciful
And just; who on the evil and the good
His rain, His sunshine, and His blessing sends.
And when His sermon great did end, we read
That they who heard His doctrine were amazed
Because that with authority He taught,
And not as did the Scribes. And thus it was
Where'er He went, thro' all His ministry.
At Jacob's well, in house of Pharisee,
In desert plain, in synagogue, in homes
Of rich and poor alike, by stream and lake,
In temples made by human hands, and in
The one great temple made by God, whose dome
Is azure, blazing with the sun by day
And decked with golden stars and moon by night,
Whose organ is the elements that breathe
In cadence low and sweet among the pines,
Or thunder in the mighty storms that shake
The temple walls; whose choir is that of birds,
And best of all, whose doors are open wide
By night and day to rich and poor alike.
The common people gladly heard, and men
Astonished said, "Never did man so speak."
For all the world was dark and man was blind,
And when He spake a light brighter than day
Spread round and close shut eyes were opened wide.
The world in sorrow and despair was dead,
But when he spake new life appeared, just as
In spring when first the sun doth stoop and kiss
The earth the tender grass is seen, while grief
Gave way to joy, despair to hope, and songs
Were heard, and hallelujahs grand, where once

Was naught but sighs. How true the words He spake,
“My words are life.”

And then behold His works.

Did mortal man e'er see the like before?
The water in His presence turns to wine
And blushes like a bride before the groom.
The boisterous sea, that clamored for the lives
Of men, at His command grows calm and still,
Like some ferocious beast that hears the voice
Of master and of friend, ceasing to growl,
Crouches upon the earth and licks his hand.
The leper, long an outcast sad, He heals
And cleanses of his leprosy. The blind
In darkness cry to Him and sight is given,
The lame at His command leap like an hart,
The tongue long held in chains of silence sings.
The racked with awful pain, and fever scorched,
He heals by just a simple word or touch.
A sadly suff'ring one, like a frail reed
From whom a thousand times all hope had fled,
Who sought the world around for health and failed,
Within the throng His seamless robe did touch,
And she was healed,—O fount of life divine!
See those in grasp of spirits dark and vile
Set free, and e'en the dead are raised to life.
There see that only daughter sweet and pure,
Just fallen asleep,—her fragrant breath just gone.
To her the Savior says, “Maiden, arise!”
And all that lovely form is thrilled with life
Again, the bosom heaves, the eyes light up,
The pale lips move, and once again she lives!
There see that only son, a widow's son;
The sad procession moves and he is borne
Toward the tomb. Christ sees the mother's tears
And says, “Weep not,” and then, touching the bier,

Exclaims, "Young man, I say to thee, arise!"
And from that bed of death he rises up
And to that joyous mother he is given.—
O mothers! what is this dear Christ to you?
Now go to yonder grave in Bethany;
Within that grave an only brother lies
Who for four days within death's cold embrace
Has holden been. His weeping sisters, see.
This brother Jesus loved and at his grave
He wept—at every grave the Savior weeps.
Now hear Him speak the word omnipotent,
While out of that dark tomb that brother steps!
O wondrous man, that had such power on earth!
And yet while His great power doth us amaze
Our hearts by His sweet spirit are overwhelmed.
Naught else but sweet incarnate love was He,
And oh, where'er there's love there's pity, too.
He was the gentle Shepherd of the flock.
The little babes He took within His arms,
And blessing them, He said, "Of such dear ones
My Kingdom is." And on the multitude
Weary and faint He had compassion true.
He fed them as the Shepherd feeds his sheep.
The bruised reed He did not break nor quench
The smoking flax. To one taken in sin
Whom others would have stoned, He said, "Now go
Thy way forgiven, in peace, and sin no more."
Behold Him on the top of Olivet.
Before Him lies ancient Jerusalem,
Within it are the souls to whom He came
Who even now are thirsting for His blood.
He knows what wicked, cruel thoughts are theirs,
And what a cruel deed they soon would do.
And yet no word of wrath He speaks, but weeps
And says, "Jerusalem! Jerusalem!
How oft I would have gathered thee as doth

A hen her brood beneath her wings, but ye
Would not, and now your desolation comes.”
Such was the Being, over all supreme,
All loving, filled with all beneficence,
Bestowing good for ill, kindness for hate,
A light to all who in dense darkness sat,
A heavenly teacher teaching the untaught,
Correcting those who had been wrongly taught;
A liberator opening prison doors;
Physician, nurse, guardian and friend to all;
A comforter to every troubled soul;
A man, and yet far more than man, divine;
A man in whom the Father lived and moved
And showed Himself unto the world in love;
The God-man fitted to redeem the world
From sin and death and make it clean as heaven.
Such was the man who at the hands of men
Must drain with all its woe the cup of death!

Oh, man! canst thou lay low
A Being so divine?
Canst thou direct the blow
With that poor heart of thine?

Hast thou the power to smite,
While God looks from above,
The fount of life and light,
Of mercy and of love?

Ah, no! but sin in thee
Shot forth the poisoned dart
From depths of misery
To pierce that loving heart.

Ah, yes, 'twas sin, and yet
Thro' thee it did the deed,
And now in deep regret
Thy heart, oh man, must bleed.

The paschal feast is o'er and Jesus now
The bread takes up and giving thanks to God
He breaks and to his loved disciples gives
And says, "This bread, my body is, broken
For you, take, eat, in memory of me."
And then the cup takes up and giving thanks
He passes it to all and says, "Drink ye
Of it each one, this is my blood that's shed
For you. Do this in memory of me."
Oh, poor disciples! who can tell what thoughts
Were theirs that night! They did not know,
They did not dream of that which was to come.
Like children whom a mother bids farewell
With her expiring breath, and bids them think
Of her when she is gone, but knowing not
The meaning of her words, so 'twas with them.

A hymn is sung and then from out that room
They pass in silence thro' the silent streets.
'Tis midnight and the paschal moon shines down
Upon them like an agonizing face,
As we have seen at times, a frozen woe.
On thro' the city gate, on down the vale,
Across the Kedron's glimmering rill into
The garden of Gethsemane. Blest place
Where often they had been before, but not
As now. In other days they came to rest
Beneath those old and gnarled olive trees
And let the breeze their heated foreheads cool,
But now it is the place of pain, and while
The world shall stand Gethsemane
Shall be the synonym of boundless grief.
"Watch ye!" He says unto His followers
"While I remove a little space and pray."
And in the stillness of that midnight hour
And in the shadow of a sheltering tree

He falls upon His face and prays: "Father
If possible let this cup pass from me,
And yet Thy will, not mine, be done." And then
Returning, finds His loved ones fast asleep!
Poor human flesh! how frail and weak art thou,
That thou canst not for just one hour keep watch!
Again, and once again He prays while drops
Of crimson grief fall to the earth like rain.
Oh, who can tell what Jesus suffered there!
And yet we know He suffered there for all,
And tasted there the cup of death that all
Might taste the cup of everlasting life.
Then rising up He bids His loved ones rise,
For lo! the traitor comes with that fierce band
Of men who like a pack of ravening wolves
Are thirsting for His blood. The traitor's kiss
Is given and He is hurried on to trial.
Go, follow Him in thought before the priests,
Before King Herod cruel, base and mean,
Where he is mocked, spit on and crowned with thorns,
And in a tattered, purple robe arrayed
And sceptered with a broken reed! O earth!
O heaven! behold the treatment of your King!
And now before the Roman governor.
Hear Pilate ask, "What evil hath He done?"
Yea, verily, what evil hath He done
That He should die and at the hands of men!
"I find no fault in Him!" hear Pilate say.
And yet unto the insatiate mob He's given.
Now Pilate, wash your hands and make them clean!
Transfer thy guilt to other hands! Alas,
How weak is man at times to do the right!
"Away with Him! Let Him be crucified!"
That is the people's voice, "*vox populi*
I'ox Dei" often falsely it is called.
Prepare the cross and lay its heavy beams

Upon the man who human grief has borne!
And now away to Calvary outside
The city walls. The golden sun has risen
And now between the thieves He's raised upon
His cross. He prays again. "Father forgive,
They know not what they do." 'Tis noon, and yet
'Tis growing dark. No cloud is in the sky,
And yet, 'tis growing dark. The sun is veiled
In grief. The heart of nature breaks. The rocks
Are rent and graves in pain throw out their dead.
He dies. The thorn-crowned head droops on His breast.
Come, soldier, with your spear, and pierce His side.
Behold the stream that flows to cleanse thy sin.
Oh, cruel cross! Why should He suffer thus?
And oft we say, "Why should we suffer thus?"
And yet were there no cross there'd be no crown.

Beyond a doubt "the way of light is by the cross;"
The path of glory and of gain is by the loss
Of much we mortals love and seek most firm to hold,
E'en as the miser counts and hides his shining gold.

God knoweth what is best for us; He marks our way
Far up the rugged hill where sweet the dawning day
More quickly comes, and gladdens our enraptured sight,
And darkness dies and all the world is filled with light.

He makes us weary; for the weary there is rest;
He bitter sorrow gives; the eyes that weep are blest;
He plants the piercing thorn; but by the thorn the rose
Puts forth its mossy bud, and then in beauty glows.

He wounds, and yet His gentle hand doth make us whole;
He grieves, and yet His comforts lift the drooping soul
Close to his side until His warm and loving kiss
Makes us forget our woe in ecstasies of bliss.

Out of our present ill some good will surely come;
It was a homeless one who sang of "Home, Sweet Home;"
The torn and bruised grape sheds forth the purple wine,
And wounds create white pearls beneath the ocean's brine.

Were there no race to run, no battle fierce to fight;
Were there no pains to rack, no fears, no death, no night,
Then there would be no crown to win, no laurel green,
No endless life to gain beyond this transient scene.

Then let us prize it well, this life that God has given,
For if its path be rough, 'tis but the way to heaven;
'Tis only when the goal is reached that we may know
That from life's sorest ills our choicest blessings flow.

The cross! Oh what a bed on which to die!
And yet no bed the world e'er saw, so fair,
Nor one so greatly to be coveted.
A bed of stainless honor, truth and love,
A bed on which to find profound repose,
A bed from which to rise in strength supreme
And look into the face of dawning day
With eyes reflecting all its light, like dew
Just fallen from heaven, that sparkles on the rose.
Go look upon that bed, take but a glance.
See there the power of hate, the power of love,
The power of human hate, of love divine!
So powerful is the sight more than a glance
Thou canst not in thy mortal weakness take.

"'Tis finished!" Sin can do no more to Him.
The gate of Death has opened wide and He
Has passed on through triumphantly to life,
Nailed to that cross by cruel hands, by hands
Of love from thence He's borne unto the tomb.
O rock hewn tomb, that once so cold and dark
To human hearts appeared, how art thou changed!

The stone is rolled before the door and sealed.
The Roman guard is set and peace draws round
The scene her mantle wooing all to rest.
The Sabbath o'er, the women lingering last
About the cross, at early dawn set forth
With spices to embalm the dust of Him
They dearly loved, and as they went they said,
While thinking of the heavy stone that stood
Against the entrance of the rocky tomb,
"Oh, who for us the stone will roll away?"
But when they came, behold! no stone was there.

The day of rest was o'er, the rosy light
Of morn had kissed the sable fringe of night.
The golden stars within her diadem
Still glimmered faintly o'er Jerusalem.

The spices were prepared and there was naught
That caused the faithful women anxious thought,
Save this, the stone that lay against the tomb,
And that tinged all their brightest hopes with gloom.

With gladsome eyes they saw the breaking day,
But who, oh, who will roll the stone away!
They know not, yet, with love's strong staff they go
Unto the grave of Him who loved them so.

Unmeasured joy! as by that grave they stand,
To roll away the stone they need no hand,
The stone is rolled away and that dark tomb
Is filled with morning light and sweet perfume.

How often we, all broken hearted say,
"Oh, who for us will roll the stone away?"
Our strength is small, oh, who will undertake
To roll away the stone for love's dear sake?

And like those women at the tomb we find
That God, who is in all His dealings kind,
Has sent His angel at the break of day
To roll for us the heavy stone away.

Oh, let us trust Him in our darkest hours,
From foul decay He brings the fragrant flowers,
From night the stars, and in good time the day;
Oh! trust Him, He will roll the stone away.

The stone was rolled away and He they sought
Had risen. The guarded grave could not retain
The soul of life that pulsates not alone
In boundless ether with unnumbered worlds,
In flowers and grass and shrub and vine and tree,
In myriad forms of insects, bird and beast,
In all that's beautiful where'er we gaze,
But in the heart and soul of man, in all
His thoughts, His yearnings—all His dreams and plans,
The inspiration of his deathless love,
His thirst for holiness and endless life,
This soul ten thousand graves could not retain,
Nor all the powers in earth or hell withhold
From coming forth to bless a sorrowing world.
The voice they thought was hushed for aye, they heard
Again. The hand they thought was cold for aye
They touched again, and it was warm with life.
The eyes they thought were closed for aye, beamed down
Upon them as of yore all full of love's
Sweet light and all their doubts were swept away
Like darkness when the cloudless sun from out
The purple sea of gloom ascends the sky,
And night is gone.

DEATH IS A FALLEN FOE!

By many signs infallible did Christ,
To those who knew Him best, give proof that He

Had risen from the dead. The doubting ones,
And none there were who doubted not at first,
Became strong men of faith, yea even more,
They *knew* that He who once was crucified,
By those pierced hands and wounded side, by that
Scarred brow and by those mangled feet, had risen.
They knew Him by His voice still full of love,
They knew Him by His breaking of the bread
When at Emmaus. Knew Him in that room,
When to the doubting one, He said, "Reach forth
Thy hand and touch these fresh made wounds;"
They know Him at the sea when morn had come
After a fruitless night of toil and at
His word their nets again they sank and caught
Them full to overflowing. They knew Him when
On Olivet He blessed them and arose
Thro' clouds beyond their sight to God again.
They knew all this and in this certitude
Went forth and preached the glorious truth to men.
Down thro' the centuries the truth has come.
To-day we clasp it to our beating hearts.
This risen Christ is mine; this risen Christ
Is yours; this risen, living, eternal Christ
Belongs to all mankind, to every race,
To high and low and rich and poor alike.
He is the "resurrection and the life."
If we believe in Him then life we have,
And ever shall possess, world without end.
Oh, may the breath of this sweet Easter Day
Catch up the balm of this blest hope and sweep
Its springtide o'er the frozen hearts of men,
Until like gardens full of fruits and flowers
And full of song and full of heavenly joy,
They wait the coming of the Gardener
Who gathers all that's beautiful and good
And shields it from the blighting power of death.

Oh, may the lily rising from the earth,
Its snowy bosom spreading to the light,
Upon this blessed Day a symbol be
Of that new life, of that new faith, of that
New hope the risen Christ bequeaths to us.
God makes the lilies His evangelists :

Easter lilies pure and white,
Emblems fair of life and light;
Easter lilies, bud and bloom
Close beside the empty tomb.

God's sweet darlings here below
In this world of grief and woe,
Words could not so well express
Heaven's love and tenderness.

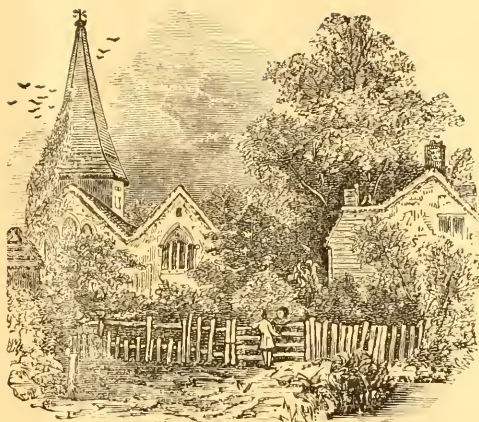
In your bosoms we may read :
“He now lives who once was dead;
Heavenward lift your weeping eyes
To those mansions in the skies.

“Look unto the pearly gates,
There thy loved-one for thee waits;
List, that voice that speaks to thee
‘Haste thy coming unto me.’ ”

Easter lilies, by your breath
Taught I am there is no death;
By the white light of your bloom
I behold an empty tomb !



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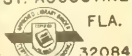






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